

Ocean Equity

Equality and equity

In an **equal** society, everyone (regardless of gender, class or ethnicity) enjoys the same access to legal rights, economic opportunities or goods and services. An **equitable** society goes one step further, guaranteeing everyone not only equality, but also fair treatment – “fairness” is subjective and will depend on social beliefs, values and practices.

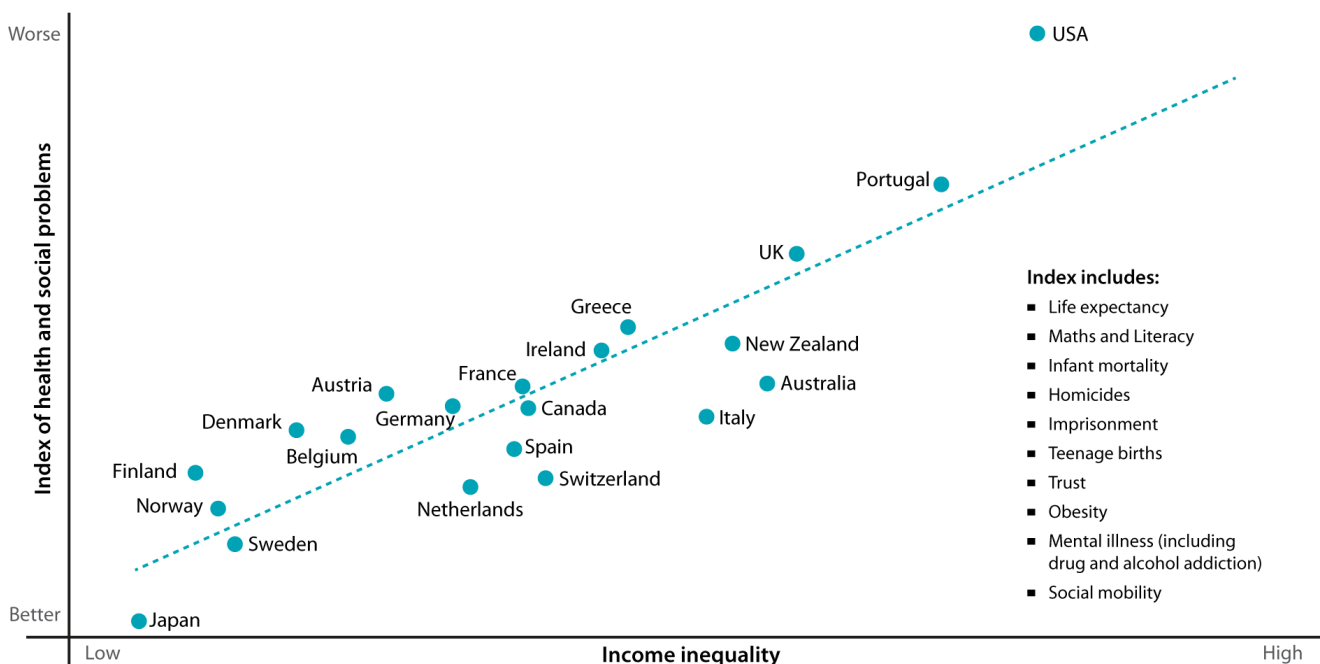
Equality and equity diverge in some cases. For instance, climate change is contributing to sea level rise – this is a risk that may be distributed equally across many coastlines, but also distributed inequitably (e.g. with indigenous and local communities or populations of small island developing states disproportionately at risk).¹ This is an example of “**distributive inequity**”.

Another example could be found in community consultations about the designation of a new marine protected area (MPA). A stakeholder dialogue about the MPA would enable equal opportunity to participate.

But this participation would likely be inequitable if, for instance, the consultation takes place during a harvest season or on a religious holiday when portions of the populations (e.g. women, ethnic minorities) are unable to easily participate. This is an example of “**procedural inequity**”.

How is it relevant for the seafood industry?

- Women are a crucial part of the seafood industry, comprising for instance an estimated 70% of the aquaculture workforce, yet only 4% of CEOs of the world’s 100 largest seafood companies are women.^{2,3}
- Between 2004 and 2014, 25 countries were responsible for roughly 82% percent of global fish catch, while six countries accounted for 77% of the global high-seas fishing fleet.^{4,5}
- 7 of the 10 most vulnerable countries to climate change impacts on fisheries are Small Island Developing States.¹



Note: Inequality has negative societal consequences for both rich and poor nations.
Sources: Wilkinson and Pickett 2009 and www.equalitytrust.org.uk.

Health and social problems are worse in more unequal countries. Adapted from [Österblom et al. 2020](#).

Currently, artisanal or small-scale fisheries account for around 50% of capture fisheries production and 90% of employment in the fisheries sector, mainly in developing countries.⁴ In some parts of the world, including in West Africa, industrial fisheries operate side-by-side with small-scale fisheries that provide livelihoods and nutrition for coastal communities, many of which are food insecure and have few nutritious alternatives to seafood. Instances of illegal activity, corruption and a lack of monitoring and surveillance are further barriers to equitable and sustainable management.

Inequality and inequity are expected to increasingly result in tension, conflict and instability, as well as reputational risk for industry actors operating in such areas.⁶ The “Blue Economy” is an aspirational vision of a vibrant future ocean economy characterized by environmental sustainability and social equity. It is an engine of growth and stability for small island developing states and least developed countries, contributing to a safer and more predictable geopolitical space.

Climate change is expected to create substantial risks for coastal communities around the world and for the seafood industry, as the distribution of fish populations shifts.⁷ While fisheries scientists and climate scientists will be able to provide insight into these changes, an equity lens will be crucial for ensuring that management decisions result in stability and sustainability.

Further reading

Towards a sustainable and equitable blue economy (2019). *Nature Sustainability* <https://rdcu.be/cjFO6>

Towards Ocean Equity (2020). *Blue Paper of the High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy* <https://www.oceanpanel.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/towards-ocean-equity.pdf>

Enabling conditions for an equitable and sustainable blue economy (2021). *Nature* <https://rdcu.be/cjFOE>

Where are women in the Seafood Industry?

- Leadership (ceo, cfo, etc.)
- Professional organisations
- Fisheries management
- Conference speakers
- Industrial fishing
- Small scale fishing
- Fisheries support activities (ashore)
- Selling and marketing
- Administration
- Quality inspection
- Researchers, marine and social sciences
- On-shore fishing - gleaning
- Small scale aquaculture
- Seafood processing (employees)
- Environment activism



Where are women in the seafood industry? Graphic designed by Xavier Crauffon, courtesy of the [International Organisation for Women in the Seafood Industry](https://www.wsi.org/) (WSI).

References

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 2. Monfort, M.C. The role of women in the seafood industry. GLOBEFISH research programme (2015).
 3. WSI. <https://womeninseafood.org/women-in-top-seafood-management-modest-improvement/> (2020)
 4. FAO. The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture - Meeting the sustainable development goals. (2020).
 5. Sala, E., et al. The economics of fishing the high seas. *Science advances* (2018).
 6. Rao, N. D., et al. Income inequality projections for the shared socioeconomic pathways (SSPs). *Futures* (2019).
 7. Golden, C. D., et al. Nutrition: Fall in fish catch threatens human health. *Nature* (2016).
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